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ROBERT F. HOXIE: INVESTIGATOR AND INTERPRETER

It is probably no overstatement to say that modern industrial problems and the part played by the trade-union movement have not been thoroughly understood or accurately examined and interpreted by a large number of our economists and sociologists. In the past too much attention has apparently been given to the study and application of previously conceived theory to industrial conditions and not enough to truly scientific investigation for the purpose of discovering and analyzing the facts.

During recent years an evident change has taken place in the academic understanding and viewpoint; less time has been devoted to weighing every industrial or trade-union activity or policy in the scales of sociological or economic theory, and a greater effort has been made to discover and interpret the underlying causes which furnish the very foundation of the human problems arising from modern industry. If we are to discover the facts, and if these are to be intelligently interpreted, it is necessary to separate and analyze all of the factors in the problem, and to have at our disposal well-defined scientific methods by the assistance of which dependable investigations may be made and intelligent interpretation given.

Perhaps in no field of the industrial problem has there been less extensive scientific study than in the one occupied by the trade-union movement. There has been some sympathetic examination by a few men of exceptional training and ability. It is true that the aims and policies of the trade-union movement have not been without a measure of intelligent understanding in the academic world, but it is unfortunately the fact that the trade-union movement in its true significance has had but few competent interpreters in the scientific group.

Within recent times, a few scientifically trained investigators and educators have carried out in the field of trade-unionism most valuable research work, which has supplied us with a wealth of historical data and in addition has greatly increased our knowledge

of the structure and function of trade-unions and employers' associations; but, unfortunately, little work of a truly scientific character has been done in the study and interpretation of the fundamental psychology which so profoundly influences the attitudes and viewpoints of those who are directly affected by our industrial problems. The wage-earners, as well as the students, have profited greatly through the assistance which has been given by those who have studied the anatomy and the history of trade-unionism but what was most urgently needed was the assistance which would come from the purely scientific investigation and interpretation of their problems.

In this country, Robert F. Hoxie was successful to a remarkable degree in discovering the character and the underlying causes of our industrial problems, particularly their human elements, and in interpreting these in a purely scientific spirit. The influence of his life's work was of such a character that the trade-unionist, the educator, the employer, and that body which we refer to as the public will richly profit for many years to come. He succeeded in charting out unknown seas in the world of industrial activity, and in preparing these charts in such a manner that they are now available to all others who desire to carry on further explorations.

In connection with the great work which he accomplished, the valuable investigations which he made, and his university teaching, he apparently had no economic, industrial, or sociological theory to defend. He was engaged in an effort to develop adequate scientific methods of research and investigation, and when the facts in any particular field of inquiry had been discovered, to analyze these minutely and state the results of the analysis coupled with their interpretations and their implications.

His lectures at the University of Chicago may not have immediately and directly affected the trade-union movement; but unquestionably their influence upon the students will have a most profound and far-reaching effect, for a body of men and women have been made acquainted with a new point of view, and have been equipped to carry on effectually the work of scientific research by being brought into personal contact as far as possible with existing conditions as well as with economic and sociological theory. These

classroom experiences are of such importance and supply us with such a well-defined example of Mr. Hoxie's methods, that they cannot escape consideration in a review of the results of Mr. Hoxie's life-work.

Mr. Hoxie not only gave his students instruction in economic and sociological theory and the history and functions of trade-unions and employers' associations, but he also brought them into actual contact with the various phases of the trade-union movement which were to be found in such an industrial center as Chicago. The recognized leaders in the trade-union movement were brought before the students for the purpose of expressing their views and their understanding of their problems; and the representatives of employers' associations and their attorneys came likewise. These men were questioned by students under Mr. Hoxie's guidance. They were called upon to undergo the most searching cross-examination, and these methods made it possible for the students to secure an altogether different atmosphere and understanding of the industrial problems than could have been secured from any textbook or series of classroom lectures.

He was training his students to search for the truth and to grasp it, and, what was of utmost importance, he was educating them in the methods through which the chaff could be separated from the sound grain so that the truth and the substance could be discovered, analyzed, and interpreted.

The industrial problem, because of the human element which enters so largely into it, and the strong appeal to the sympathies which it presents, makes unbiased investigation and interpretation most difficult. Recognizing this, Mr. Hoxie applied the most rigorous rules in his work to prevent himself from being influenced by any factor except the truth which he was endeavoring to discover.

This quality was well illustrated by an experience which the writer had during the investigation of the relationship of scientific management to labor which Mr. Hoxie made for the Commission on Industrial Relations. It had become advisable to learn the personal experiences and views of the workers in a large establishment where partial trade-union organization existed. It was

determined to secure from the firm a list of those men who were considered most satisfactory and of those who were considered most unsatisfactory; and also from the officers of the several unions whose members were employed there, a list of the men whom they considered the most loyal and active, and of their most indifferent or unreliable, members. It was decided to interview these employees singly and in private, each investigator to work alone. A comparison and analysis of the notes was to be made only after the investigation had been finished. To prevent any bias in the investigators' minds and to keep them in an atmosphere where their undivided thought would be given to discovering exactly what was in the minds of those being interviewed, Mr. Hoxie insisted that at the close of each day's investigation there should be no discussion of what had been discovered or secured by the investigators. It so happened that both investigators encountered a condition of an extraordinary character during the first day's work, a discovery which was profoundly significant; but Mr. Hoxie gave no evidence of the knowledge he had secured until the investigation had been completed and the notes were being analyzed.

To have adopted any other policy than the one pursued under the circumstances would have resulted in a more or less partial and incomplete investigation. What was necessary to obtain was what lay closest to the worker's mind, rather than any evidence which would tend to substantiate something which one of the investigators might have desired to prove or disprove. Only by keeping each investigator's mind free from any external influence or from any predetermined purpose during the investigation, and concentrating wholly upon the one task of securing exactly what lay in the worker's mind, was it possible to cover all of the ground presented by the opportunity.

In his investigations of any industrial problem, as far as individuals were concerned, he employed the Socratic method, believing that this was the most effective in securing practical and dependable results, and this same method was applied as far as possible to his investigation of the facts connected with trade-union activity or policy. Mr. Hoxie's questions were always practical as well as pointed. Are agreements between trade-unions and employers

which regulate the terms of employment advantageous to the wage-earners, to the employers, and to the public? If so, why? If not, why not? The answers to these questions by trade-unionists, employers, and publicists supplied the outlines of the ground which must be examined to secure the facts and to furnish avenues of investigation which otherwise might be most difficult to discover. Do such agreements tend to establish the principles of democracy in the industry? Do they serve to give the contracting parties a more accurate understanding of each other's problems and viewpoint? Do they tend to establish peace in the industry? Are they of temporary or of permanent value? If such agreements are of value, in what direction does their greatest value lie? Do they tend to increase or minimize the industrial struggle? Does their influence tend to build up larger and more powerful organizations of workers and employers? Are they educational in their influence? Do they tend to create a greater sense of responsibility on the part of trade-unionists and employers? Is their form or the spirit with which they are entered into most important? Can such agreements operate advantageously where there exist considerable differences in the degree of organization and discipline maintained by the contracting parties? Is their general influence such as to warrant approval?

It was through such a series of questions, appropriately applied to every phase of the industrial problem, that the ground to be explored was uncovered and the first rough map prepared, from which he was later enabled to make those extensive and minutely detailed examinations and analyses which were characteristic of his work.

These studies of trade-unionism which Mr. Hoxie made were far deeper than an examination of trade-union history or anatomy, or the analysis of trade-union policies and laws. He attended conventions of the American Federation of Labor and of other trade-unions for the purpose of studying the trade-unionists in action. He interviewed the prominent delegates for the purpose of learning the reasons which prompted them to assume the attitude they did toward certain important questions discussed during the sessions. He acquired an extensive acquaintance with the recog-

nized leaders of the movement, and then, to offset the influences of this group, he formed the acquaintance of the active spirits in the ranks. He secured their own view of their problems, as well as that of their leaders. He attended meetings while strikes were in progress and talked with pickets while on duty and afterward. He was present in court when trials arising from industrial disputes were in progress. He met the attorneys for both parties; he talked with the judge. He continually searched for the underlying factors which moved the workers in their activities.

It was through such methods as these that he became so thoroughly acquainted with the publicly expressed opinions and privately entertained views of those taking an active part in the employed and employing groups in the industrial world. In this manner he succeeded in discovering the truth and the essential facts which were necessary if an accurate, comprehensive, systematic, and articulated presentation of the problem was to be given.

Although he was ever searching for additional facts and studying the objective effects of our industrial system, the principal object which he had in mind was the discovery of the underlying causes. It was his conviction that no intelligent understanding of an industrial problem could be secured until the basic causes had been discovered. He was much more interested in the discovery of these causes than in studying their effects. As a result of this purpose which guided him, he was remarkably successful in giving definite form and substance to many phases of the problem where but hazy outlines had previously existed.

The changing forms of policy adopted by trade-unions and employers' associations interested him mostly in that they afforded an opportunity of discovering and studying the causes which had influenced their development. He persistently sought to discover the motives which influenced the groups in the determination of their policies and their form of organization. He deemed it essential to discover the part which was played by the character of the industry, the quality of leadership, and the temperament and viewpoint of the group. It was essential that an accurate analysis should be secured, so that it would be possible to demonstrate to what degree the trade-union policy was shaped by the employers'

attitude and the extent to which employers modified or altered their policy because of some position taken by organized labor.

The trade-union movement presented a complex rather than a simple structure to him. Some organizations were comparatively conservative and business-like in their methods, some were thoroughly committed to the policy of agreements with national associations of employers covering the terms of employment for definite periods. Others, while equally in favor of such agreements with employers, were strongly disinclined to enter into those of a national character, but, instead, insisted upon having local agreements only. There were other unions which did not believe in trade agreements. Some unions were radical in their program, some were revolutionary in their character, while others seemingly placed more dependence upon legislative effort than upon direct dealing with the employers.

Why did these differences in policy exist? Once the cause for their adoption had been discovered and accurately analyzed, it would be possible to understand more thoroughly and accurately certain fundamental problems arising from the relationship of employer and employee. Such was his program.

The preparations which he made for his investigation of scientific management in its relation to labor and the methods which he applied during the investigation supply an excellent example of the thoroughness with which he carried on work of this character.

Before making the actual investigation for the determination of the facts, he made a comprehensive study of all that had been written and publicly spoken by the leading representatives of scientific management, and the leaders of the trade-union movement, these being the forces who favored or were opposed to scientific management. As a result of this preliminary study, he was able to distinguish and separate over a hundred distinct claims made by the scientific management group, and approximately an equal number of charges which had been made against this new system of production by the trade-unions.

After compiling these two lists, he presented the claims of the scientific management group, as he had prepared them, to the recognized leaders of that group for their personal examination and

criticism, and for such modifications or alterations as they should deem necessary in order to state accurately their claims and their views.

A similar method was adopted with the list of charges against this system of production which had been made by trade-unionists. These were submitted to the leaders of the American trade-union movement for the same purpose for which the claims in favor of scientific management had been presented to the leaders of the scientific management group. This placed him in possession of the authoritative claims and charges of the respective parties. He therefore held, before beginning the actual work of investigating, the authoritative statements of the opposing parties in such form that their accuracy could not be successfully challenged.

These two lists in their final form were then compared for the purpose of discovering the vital points of difference which existed between them, after which a list of questions was prepared, the answers to which, when accompanied by the necessary evidence, would determine the accuracy of any charge or claim which had been made. This questionnaire, which contained some 700 separate points upon which information was desired, supplied a mass of dependable information upon which to base conclusions.

Mr. Hoxie realized that the questionnaire in itself was insufficient to discover all of the vital facts. Something more was necessary, this being the personal contact of the investigator with the problem, the opportunity of studying the system in operation. He decided that, before submitting this questionnaire to an employer in whose plant scientific management had been introduced, he would first personally inspect the plant and secure first-hand information from those employed in the administrative department, in the planning-room, and in the shop itself. Realizing the danger of personally formed opinions and of failure to grasp all that came to his notice, and desiring to prevent as far as possible the formation of erroneous conclusions, he insisted, before undertaking the field work, that he should be provided with two experts, one representing management and personnel and the other representing labor. In their selection the field was thoroughly canvassed, and the experts were accepted only after having passed

careful tests as to their reliability and knowledge and their standing in the respective groups from which they were chosen.

These experts served as a check against oversight or false conclusions, and they provided the means of placing the chief investigator in contact with more phases of the problems presented in each establishment investigated than could have been the case had Mr. Hoxie worked alone. Every point of importance which had been encountered was discussed and carefully analyzed and weighed before it was accepted.

The method which he adopted in this investigation was practical, comprehensive, and certain of securing the information required for the examination of the question from its several angles. It is because of its thoroughgoing nature and scientific accuracy that the report which he submitted has proved of such great value.

Throughout the investigation he was governed by the thought that it was not his purpose to prove or disprove any theory, but to secure the facts, present these in systematic and comprehensive form, and compare the conditions which were found to exist with the claims and the charges which had been made. The method, the form, and the spirit of this investigation are of invaluable assistance to those who are studying and endeavoring to interpret our industrial problems.

Mr. Hoxie believed that we stood in greatest need of the scientific interpreter. He aimed, not only to provide the means for the scientific study of every phase of the problem, but, in addition, to map out the methods required for the purpose of giving sound interpretations of the conditions discovered.

A few days before his death he said in a letter to the writer, "I have come to feel very strongly that it is the whole social environment that influences men, and that the most effective influence, after all, is what we call the educational. Men are no doubt most strongly influenced by the material forces which touch them, but few men are capable of interpreting the meaning of these material forces. What we are in need of more than anything else, if we are to have social progress and social betterment, is interpretation."

His mental poise was that of the true scientist, but coupled with this was a keen love of justice, deep human sympathy, and a rare ability to grasp and understand the underlying motives which influence men. In his work, he demonstrated remarkable powers for minute analysis and a rare ability to investigate the complicated human problems connected with industry. He was able to separate these so that they could be examined apart and also in their relation to each other. The personal investigation and contact with the problems which he was studying had enabled him to grasp much which lay beyond the printed page and the spoken word and to discover the frequently indistinct or confused trails which, when followed up, led to the truth.

To the trade-union movement one of the most valuable features of Mr. Hoxie's work was the purely scientific study which he made of the movement itself and of its problems. The methods by which he accomplished his work and which he transmitted to a large number of students cannot help but prove of tremendous value to the investigator and interpreter of our industrial problems as a whole.

He was able to demonstrate effectively that the historian and anatomist of trade-unionism must be supplemented by the psychologist, if any accurate understanding of the human factors in the industrial problem is to be reached.

The result of his life-work has been a better and broader understanding of the problem and a more intelligent appreciation of its character. Investigators in the field of industrial problems will be profoundly influenced through the methods for scientific research which he developed.

As a scientist he contributed largely to our fund of knowledge; as a psychologist he supplied a viewpoint which had been but dimly seen before; and as an interpreter he gave an understanding of the innermost motives, as well as the more obvious ones, which influence men in their relationship of employer and employee.

JOHN P. FREY